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Sustainable development: implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

Letter dated 26 March 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Namibia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you the Namib Declaration on a stronger United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa for a land-degradation-neutral world, which was adopted at the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Windhoek from 16 to 27 September 2013 (see annex). You may recall that world leaders attending the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development agreed to strive to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world (paras. 205-209 of the "The future we want", General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex).

I would appreciate it if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 19 (e) in support of the sustainable development goals and post-2015 sustainable development processes.

(*Signed*) Penda **Naanda**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 26 March 2014 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Namibia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Namib Declaration on a stronger United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for a land degradation neutral world

On the occasion of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Windhoek, Namibia, the Member States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other organizations (with observer status), are called upon to commit to enhance sustainable land management and improve livelihoods at global, regional, national and especially at the local level.

This being the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention since the agreement on "The future we want". Parties agree that new and refreshed momentum is required to address our planet's environmental and social challenges regarding desertification, land degradation and drought.

In the context of the Convention, critical decisions had to be made during the eleventh session, concerning the further implementation of the 10-year strategy after midterm evaluation, establishment of a science-policy interface to improve knowledge-based decision-making in the convention process, enhancing the integration of desertification, land degradation and drought-related aspects in the development of the sustainable development goals, as well as the improvement of the functions of the Global Mechanism through its housing within the secretariat.

Being hosted for the first time in history in southern Africa, this Conference made the specific effort of facilitating dialogues with the local communities most affected by the effects of desertification, land degradation and drought in Namibia, and to inject these voices into the decision-making processes. Furthermore, civil society representatives and participants from indigenous peoples from around the world attended the session. Technically inspiring and stimulating side events as well as excursions were part of the agenda and contributed to a deeper understanding of the real-life realities of desertification, land degradation and drought in local communities.

Based on the deliberations, the Government of the Republic of Namibia hereby would like to make the following declaration:

Declaration

1. Strengthen the leadership of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for the future we want

1. As host country, we have the responsibility to indicate that there was different momentum in the willingness of parties to address the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in the context of the Convention. Seeing daily that the world is challenged by ever-increasing problems relating to the loss and degradation of arable soils, and related critical ecosystem services, which are linked to food security, livelihoods and poverty, we feel that much stronger and dedicated leadership is required to secure the future we want.

Although we were successful in laying out an initial intergovernmental process that will examine issues related to the Rio+20 over the coming two years, we would have liked the Conference to set a bolder agenda for a global land degradation problem at this session in Windhoek. We consider decision ICCD/COP(11)/L.20 a milestone decision for further thinking on these matters.

2. As a country affected by desertification, land degradation and drought, we have taken the implementation of the Convention forward through national action programmes, dating back to the beginning of our independence. Based on our own experiences, we would like to engage with all parties to and partners of the Convention, in advancing practical solutions that will have positive impacts in reversing and halting land degradation on the ground.

3. And therefore, we count on the support of all parties to make the Convention stronger for a land-degradation-neutral world, and welcome the outcome of the United nations Conference on Sustainable Development with regard to the desertification, land degradation and drought.

2. Address drought mitigation as a matter of priority

4. Droughts can severely impact on sustainable land management and reverse achievements in good rangeland management and agricultural practices. Therefore, an increased emphasis on drought mitigation must be given. Momentum towards the development of national drought policies focusing on increasing the long-term preparedness and resilience of farmers and communities to instances of drought must be strengthened. We understand this as critical linkage to climate change challenges, exacerbating already existing land degradation problems, including in areas that previously were not drylands.

3. Advance the science-policy interface

5. We agree on the need for increased use of science-based solutions and research for improved on-the-ground decision-making and effective implementation of this convention. In our understanding, such science incorporates traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of rural communities, human and sociological sciences, complementing biophysical and economic understanding. We strongly advocate that the proposed science-policy interface established at this session will enhance policy directives under this convention.

4. Focus on local communities

6. We recognize the important role of local and rural communities in areas affected by desertification, land degradation and drought. Not only are they the most affected, but their contributions to traditional knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to the sustainable land management and usage of soils, as well as for combating and reversing land degradation, are essential. Therefore, Namibia urges all parties and relevant institutions to direct resources and efforts into more meaningful and dedicated actions to ensure sustainable livelihoods and food security.

5. Engage with the private sector

7. Recognizing the role of the private sector towards innovative strategies and relevant technologies for establishing a business case for reversing land degradation and enhancing land restoration, partnerships must be fostered.

6. Empower women in sustainable land management

8. Women are critical pillars in achieving the convention's strategic objectives. The outcomes of the first ever "Gender Day" convened within this session, offer means to advance the empowerment of women affected by desertification, land degradation and drought in decision-making, access to material resources and knowledge. The Windhoek Initiative on Women's Empowerment will be a key component that Namibia will advance during its presidency of the Conference.